

Portrait, in Songs, of a Lost World

Monday, November 17, 2008; C07

Everything that a song recital can achieve, in terms of musical revelation, vocal excellence and audience engagement, was exemplified at the [Kennedy Center Terrace Theater](#) on Friday night when the Vocal Arts Society presented the New York Festival of Song's "Fugitives."

A collaboration by festival artistic director and pianist Steven Blier, mezzo-soprano Kate Lindsey and tenor Joseph Kaiser, "Fugitives" unearthed works of composers who fled -- or tried to flee -- [Nazi Germany](#) and produced what was called "entartet" or "degenerate" art. The dark humor of [Kurt Weill](#)'s cabaret, the elusive, haunting beauty of Alexander von Zemlinsky's expressionism and the wrenching pathos of agitprop came together and overlapped in songs that depicted everything from black markets, stocks and governmental mistrust to larger themes like relationships, loss and dreams.

A renowned programming genius, Blier created a rich, all-encompassing portrait of a time that, psychologically at least, seemed not so remote. He also made compelling arguments for little-known composers such as Hans Krása, who died in a concentration camp. Though the audience had been asked to hold applause, a hum of appreciation filled the hall after most songs.

Throughout, Lindsey displayed admirable technique and a dark, lucid tone evocative of moonlit water. No matter what genre she was singing, her interpretations managed to appear both well thought out and spontaneous -- basically, the theatrical ideal.

Though less polished, Joseph Kaiser is one of the most promising tenors around. His bright, ringing tone and earnest demeanor made Hanns Eisler's "Andere die Welt, sie braucht es" ("Change the world, it needs it") as powerful an entreaty for social action as any Washington has recently heard.

-- **Ronni Reich**